

Holy Week 2013

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

*¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”
(Mark 11:9-10. ESV)*

*¹⁷And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”
(Mark 11:17. ESV)*

*³⁷And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:37-39. ESV)*

*⁶And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”
(Mark 16:6-7. ESV)*

Atonement and Access

Good Friday, 2013

Mark 15:16-39

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Mark 15:16-39. This text was read earlier for you in the service and I want you to have it open before you now as we reflect upon the meaning of the cross. I’ve told you before that I find the Good Friday message to be the most intimidating message of the year. This is partly because of the significance of the issue – the cross is ground zero for all Christian theology so if you get this wrong everything you build on top of it will fall and fail. It is also partly because of the sheer immensity of the cross – the significance of the cross simply cannot be discussed in 40 minutes and the problem would not go away if you gave me 400 minutes – the cross is connected to EVERYTHING we believe and therefore the Apostle Paul could say to a church that he spent nearly two years preaching to:

²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 2:2. ESV)

Apparently Paul did not find it all difficult to preach on the significance of the cross of Jesus Christ for nearly two years. Preaching on the cross is rather like attempting to empty the Pacific Ocean with a tea cup – one doesn't expect to exhaust the topic and close his Bible and say to his people: "Well there you have it!" No, the cross dominates the mind of a Christian person all the days of his life. We will not "explain the cross" this morning. We will attempt, in all our human frailty and partial insight, to reflect upon two themes that appear rather prominently in the text before us. Before we do that however, we will cast ourselves upon the mercy of Almighty God in prayer.

I want to draw your attention this morning to two themes that appear to receive particular emphasis in Mark's Gospel. They are I think anticipated by the story we looked at on Palm Sunday about the cursing of the fig tree and the condemning of the temple. Have that Scripture in the back of your mind as we look particularly at Mark 15:33-34 in order to talk about the theme of atonement and then also Mark 15:37-38 as we talk about access to God through Jesus Christ our great High Priest. Let's talk first about the death of Christ upon the cross as an act of atonement.

Atonement

Let me read again to you verses 33-34:

³³And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33-34. ESV)

That the darkness means to symbolize God's wrath and judgment is not often disputed. Darkness is mentioned in Deuteronomy 28:29 as a sign of God's displeasure and as a feature of his punishment upon the people and it shows up many times in the Bible meaning more or less the same thing. What is disputed in this passage is what is meant by Jesus' quotation from Psalm 22. Psalm 22 is a Psalm about pain and anguish and the feeling that people can have of being totally abandoned by God in their miseries and yet, at the end, the Psalmist remains certain that

he is not in fact finally abandoned by God though all at the moment seems dark and hostile. It is uncertain what Jesus means by quoting it and it is not at all clear what Mark means by recording it. Matthew and Mark record this saying whereas John and Luke do not. Throughout the history of the church we have generally agreed that it CANNOT mean that there was a rupture of the Trinity at the moment when Christ became or took upon himself the sins of his people. It cannot mean that and there is absolutely no indication that Jesus intended it to mean that. It has generally been understood to mean that Jesus was intentionally identifying with all the hurt, all the pain and all the abandonment that human beings have experienced as a result of Adam's sin. One of the things you have to understand about sin and particularly the first sin – the sin of Adam and Eve is that one of the consequences of that sin was alienation from God. The great theologian A.A. Hodge puts it this way; he asks the question “What was the effect of Adam's sin upon himself? And answers that question by stating:

In the covenant relation which Adam sustained to God the penalty of the covenant of works was incurred, i.e., death including 1) mortality of body, 2) corruption of soul, 3) sentence of eternal death.¹

He goes on to say that:

“the favour and communion of God, the sole condition of his spiritual life, was withdrawn”².

Sin caused Adam to begin to die, to begin to grow cold and to embark on a path of open hostility toward God. And the favour and communion of God was withdrawn. Theologians refer to this as “alienation”. The Apostle Paul says:

¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10. ESV)

The Bible clearly states that as sons and daughters of Adam we are born into a state of alienation from God. We are born alone. We face pain - we are hurt people who hurt people. We ache and often we don't even know why! There is a God shaped hole inside of us that aches and consumes us from the inside out. We are aliens and strangers and we feel the utter forsakenness of our condition. Jesus on the cross steps into that place ON OUR BEHALF – in a substitutionary sense. Those words from Psalm 22: “Why have you forsaken me” do not imply a rupture in the Trinity – that is theologically and ontologically impossible – they imply that Jesus is acting in our

¹ A.A. Hodge, Outlines of Theology; p. 323.

² Ibid; p. 323.

place. He has assumed the burden of our failed and forsaken status in order to make peace in his own body.

This is why theologians use the phrase PENAL SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT. Each word is very important. Let me walk through them.

1. Penal

The word “penal” refers to “penalty”. Jesus on the cross assumes the PENALTY that is due to human sin. This is incredibly important. God had told Adam in the garden that if he sinned he would die. Part of what it means to die was experienced by Adam right away – he began to die physically. He began to age. He began to decrease and become frail and he eventually did die. He also lost the presence of the Holy Spirit. God was not “with him” in the sense that he had been with him before he sinned. This led to increasing depravity. Man was created to be led by the Holy Spirit and apart from the Holy Spirit we move only in the direction of sin and depravity. The third part of what it means to die – everlasting death and alienation – was deferred and recalled through symbol. God slew an animal and made a covering. God was reminding Adam that a part of the penalty due to him was being deferred and temporarily substituted. The entire temple complex, as we mentioned last week, was designed to remind people of their outstanding debt to God and their on-going need of full satisfaction:

³But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;

⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” (Hebrews 10:3-7. ESV)

The Bible is saying that year after year when people went to the temple to sacrifice a goat they were being reminded of the outstanding penalty that they owed because of sin and the inability for the blood of these sacrifices to finally and ultimately provide satisfaction. Something more must be coming.

Jesus is the something more. That is why John said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29. ESV)

Not the lamb of God who reminds you, not the lamb of God who defers – finally, the lamb of God who TAKES AWAY the sin of the world! When a crime is committed within a legal framework a punishment is prescribed and if God is to be JUST and if God is to be MERCIFUL then God himself must pay himself an appropriate penalty for the crimes committed. Karl Barth, despite his many other flaws, understood this issue perfectly well. He said that on the cross Jesus is the Judge judged in our place. That fine sentence provides a bridge between our first two words, PENAL and SUBSTITUTIONARY.

2. Substitutionary

The idea of a substitute runs all throughout the Old Testament. Remember that the Temple complex and all of its sacrifices were fundamentally prophetic and didactic – meaning that they didn’t actually DO ANYTHING, rather they looked forward to something and they taught about what that something would actually do. They are visual aids and signs pointing beyond themselves to something bigger, better and future. One of the constant features of the temple complex was the practice of substitution. Flip quickly in your Bible to Leviticus. Look first at chapter 1:4

⁴He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. (Leviticus 1:4. ESV)

The animal became a substitute for him. God had said that the punishment for sin was death – all of what that implies – but God in his mercy wished to defer the ultimate meaning of that having planned from eternity past to provide in the fullness of time a PERFECT SATISFACTION FOR SIN in the person of his Son Jesus Christ. In the meantime he was prepared to accept a substitute. Not as final in and of itself, but as a faithful anticipation of the lamb of God who would in fact, take away the sin of the world. The lamb is a substitute for the sins of the one whose hand is laid upon it.

For more on what that hand implies look at Leviticus 16:21ff:

²¹And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. (Leviticus 16:21. ESV)

The laying on of the hand is accompanied by confession of sin and God in his mercy is prepared to accept that as a token of faith and repentance in anticipation of something ultimate and final. That something ultimate and final is JESUS CHRIST UPON THE CROSS – just as it was prophesied of him 600 years before his birth!

⁴ **Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;**

yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5. ESV)

When Jesus cried out upon the cross, quoting from Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” he was entering into the brokenness of humanity, the pain of our alienation and the depths of our lostness and despair. He was choosing to identify with fallen humanity in all of its ugliness and depravity. He was shouldering our grief and our sorrow so that he could bear in his body the PENALTY that brought us peace. His death was a price paid – it was penal; and it was substitutionary – it was for me and for you. It was for the sins of all who lay their hand upon him in faith, confession and repentance from sin.

3. Atonement

The Hebrew word translated “atonement” is *kaw-far*’ means “covering” or “propitiation”, it has the sense of to hide or get rid of that which made for hostility or offense. The Greek word translated “atonement” is *kat-al-lag-ay*’ is a word borrowed from the legal world and means legal reparations as the ground of reconciliation. We see this word in Romans 5 for example:

¹¹And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Romans 5:11. KJV)

Paul is saying through Jesus – through his death upon the cross – we have right standing before a Holy God. When we talk about the death of Christ on the cross as an atonement then, we mean

two things. We mean first that his death satisfied the legal debt to God that we had incurred through sin. Secondly we mean that his life – his perfect obedience earns us the reward of eternal life. Let me put that in real simple terms. His DEATH paid the penalty our sin deserved. The Bible says:

²⁰The soul that sinneth, it shall die. (Ezekiel 18:20. KJV)

If you sin – and we all do – the penalty for that is death. That truth hangs over all humanity as a curse until the cross of Jesus Christ. Your sin warrants and deserves an eternity of dying and separation from a Holy God and yet God in his mercy is not willing that all should perish. And so he sent his Son to bear in his body the price he himself had declared appropriate for the soul who rebelled and hated his creator. Jesus in his death pays the penalty God promised to Adam in the garden. Your debt, if your hand has been laid on Christ through faith is discharged. It is paid in full and you are free. He whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

Secondly, his life EARNs our reward. Remember that God did not merely threaten punishment to Adam in the Garden, he also promised reward. If Adam obeyed the Lord and kept his Word then he would eat from the tree of life and live forever in the presence of his Creator. These are the very rewards given back to us in Jesus Christ. He paid for what Adam did – AND he did what Adam never did. He obeyed the law perfectly and submitted to the will of the Father ENTIRELY. The Bible says:

⁵You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 18:5. ESV)

Make no mistake – you are saved by works – CHRIST’S WORKS! They are grace to you because they are applied to your account by faith even though you yourself failed miserably – but they are works to Christ. His work is our grace. That is why the Bible is so careful to describe the death of Christ on the cross not just as a sacrifice for sin but also as the climactic conclusion to a life of total and perfect obedience.

¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19. ESV)

Adam's failure to obey brought upon us the curse of death – Jesus paid that price on the cross but also went on to earn all the rewards Adam was promised so that those things too could be ours by grace through faith. When you lay your hand upon Christ in repentance and faith, your sins are transferred to his body on the cross and his obedience – with all the reward earned thereby – is transferred to your account. This is the full meaning of grace, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21. ESV)

Blessed be the Name of the Lord!

Access

Turn back in your Bibles to Mark 15 and let me show you one more thing before we close. Look at verses 37-38:

³⁷And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. (Mark 15:37-38. ESV)

The curtains in the temple represented degrees of separation. They kept you from coming any closer to God than you were entitled to come. There were two main curtains in the temple, the outer curtains separated the regular people from the priests and the inner curtain separated the space accessible to the priests from the space accessible only to the High Priest, the space known as The Holy Of Holies. Though Mark doesn't tell us which curtain was torn at the moment Jesus died the author of the Hebrews reflects upon this at length. He says:

¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-20. ESV)

Speaking of how Jesus entered into this Holy Place on our behalf he goes on to say:

¹¹But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²**he entered once for all into the holy places**, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God**. (Hebrews 9:11-14. ESV)

Remember now our message last week. Jesus in Mark 11 rejects the temple complex – it was promising something it could not deliver. Season after season, year after year it provided only a reminder of its own powerlessness to deliver a remedy for sin. The complex itself REEKED of sin. The priesthood was corrupted and the leadership fallen and ruined. Jesus taught a great many things that week before Passover that we were unable to read last Sunday. He also told parables that very overtly expressed his rejection of the entire leadership cast of Israel and this did not go unnoticed. After telling one parable that prophesied the coming death and judgment of the leadership caste, Mark records:

¹²And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for **they perceived that he had told the parable against them.** (Mark 12:12. ESV)

Jesus in the cursing of the fig tree and in the telling of these parables has rejected the temple and her leaders and now in the moment of his death he declares all of their divisions and all of their reminders obsolete – the curtain of the temple is torn from top to bottom. In this one act Jesus is declaring two glorious truths. A way is open now for men and women to have intimate communion with their Creator. And Jesus is that way. He now is our High Priest who takes us by the hand and leads us to the footstool of Almighty God. This is what it means in the Bible to be a high priest. A high priest goes into the Holy of Holies carrying with him in a symbolic sense all of God's people. Do you recall that on the vestments of the High Priest were 12 stones representing the fullness of God's people? He carried the people into the presence of God! Now Jesus realizing that promise carries us IN HIS PERSON back into the presence of God. We were banished in Adam and we are restored in Christ. That is why Hebrews goes on to declare:

¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to **enter the holy places** by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us **through the curtain**, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²**let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith**, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22. ESV)

In Adam you were born an alien and a stranger to God. You were alone and you felt it. It birthed an ache in your soul that you could not fill with drugs, or sex or human relationships or material goods or success or money or fame or anything else you tried to stick in there. It ached. It grew and it consumed you and maddened you and destroyed you. But now in Christ, you are home. In Christ you are near. You are close to God. You are a son. You are a daughter. You are loved.

Therefore draw near. Come close. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Christ on the cross is our atonement and he is our access to the Holy Places of Almighty God. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

Response:

Now, the job of a pastor on Good Friday is not just to explain certain things about the cross, it is to help people respond appropriately to the glory and the beauty and the graces of the cross. We have looked today in the time that we have at two aspects of the cross and so let me suggest two appropriate responses to the work of Christ on our behalf.

1. Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31)

I like the awkwardness of the KJV for this verse because what the Bible calls us to in terms of response is more than believing “in” Jesus. Demons believe in Jesus. Believing “on” or “upon” is what the text says whether we say it like that in English or not. In the Greek it is *epi* plus the accusative which means “to believe on” or “to believe upon”. The sense is to believe into, to throw yourself upon utterly – it means to cast your lot in with Christ, it means to join your fate to his by faith. It means, to lay your hand upon Christ in faith and confession and repentance such that your sin passes to his body on the cross and his righteousness passes to your account as grace. The Bible is very clear on this my friend, your sin will be paid for in full. Either in your person or in the person of Jesus Christ. God has not stopped being Holy. If you are in Christ by faith – if you have cast yourself upon him, if you have laid your hand upon him – then your sins are paid for in his body. If you are not – if when the music stops and you find yourself in the body before the throne of God and you think to argue your case on your own merits you will face the full fury of his wrath for all eternity. Sin will be punished. In his body or in yours. And so I invite you – I beg you – to cast yourself upon Christ. Put your hand on him in faith. Pray right now where you sit, as I speak and confess your sins before him. Do not lie to him. Do not withhold. Let go of your pride and admit. You are a hurt person who hurts people. You have responded to your aloneness by victimizing other people. You have used people to sooth your own aloneness. And you have defied God. You have thought yourself wise enough to decide right and wrong for yourself. You are a rebel and you have justly fallen under curse and

condemnation. Confess that to him now and ask in faith for your sin to fall upon his body and his righteousness to be credited to your account.

2. Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith

If you are hearing this message as a believer – if sometime in the past you laid your hand upon Christ in faith – then you need to hear this afresh for the purpose of attaining full assurance of your faith. Fresh contemplation of the cross unlocks for us levels of intimacy and enjoyment and experience that are not often ours at our conversion.

C.H. Spurgeon was a huge fan of John Bunyan and specifically of Pilgrim's Progress. It was basically his stock sermon illustration. It is estimated by Spurgeon scholars that he quoted or referenced Bunyan in more than 25% of his sermons. Spurgeon was a fan. But there was one aspect of Pilgrim's Progress that troubled Spurgeon. He was never entirely comfortable with the fact that Christian did not lose his burden and receive his gifts until sometime after he passed through the narrow gate. Do you remember the story? Pilgrim was pulled by Mr. Goodwill through the wicket gate. The gate is Christ – at the moment Goodwill pulls Christian through he is saved! And yet, Christian asks Mr. Goodwill if he will help him off with his burden and Mr Goodwill tells him to bear it yet a little longer. Christian passes through the House of Interpreter and is taught many useful things there and then passing down the road a little further he comes to a hill and upon the hill he sees the cross whereon his Saviour died. And it is there in contemplation of the cross as a saved man that Christian's burden falls from his back and rolls down the hill into the empty tomb. Spurgeon delighted in the scene but always wished it moved a little earlier in the story. Bunyan scholars always assert that Spurgeon need not have worried. Bunyan was not teaching anything close to a two stage conversion. Bunyan was simply teaching what all the Puritans taught. There are many things which we possess from the moment of our conversion which we do not fully experience or enjoy until we have gone deeper in our contemplation of the cross. That is why Christian is met at the cross by the Shining Ones who give him gifts. Gifts that symbolize the sense of belonging, the sense of holiness and the sense of assurance.

My fellow Christians, there are treasures now in your possession that you have not yet the full enjoyment of because of your neglect of the cross! When you understand the riches of the cross

you will have an assurance and a boldness to draw near unto God – you will pray BELIEVING, without fear or doubting – just as Jesus said in Mark 11! You will say to that mountain ‘arise and be cast into the sea’ – you will know God and love his will and in his name pray the impossible into being! There is intimacy, assurance and POWER in contemplation of the cross. Draw near unto God and he will draw near unto you. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.